

Whispering Selves and Reflective Transformations in the Internal Dialogue of Teachers and Students

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It is beyond debate that the way one perceives oneself is influenced by the way one speaks to oneself. Becoming aware of the conversations that take place within the mind has the potential to assist one in recognizing whether the internal voice is self-limiting or self-encouraging. Making classrooms places where teachers and learners are inviting to themselves and each other is a key aspect of invitational theory and practice. My intent in this paper is to (1) discuss the influential role of the inner voice in shaping the experiences of teachers and students in classrooms, (2) introduce the art of transformation in their internal dialogue through ongoing self-reflection, monitoring, and revisions to the ways they speak to themselves, and (3) highlight the practical implications in classroom settings. The paper invites teachers and students to envision themselves in positive ways by promoting the transformation of negative, unhealthy, and irrational self-talk to inner communication that is positive, productive, and rational.

Introduction

If you hear a voice within you saying, "You are not a painter," then by all means paint... and that voice will be silenced.

Vincent Van Gogh

An individual's journey in life is interwoven with invaluable learning experiences. The internal dialogue that takes place before, during, and after the experiences influences,

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the perceptive filters, interpretive paradigms, and the meanings that are abstracted from conversations and events.

The manner in which these are understood is altered when the internal dialogue is changed. By engaging in reflective practice, people can delve deeper into the intricate aspects of their thought patterns and become increasingly conscious of their values, beliefs, and assumptions and how they in turn frame how they behave.

The thoughts of many philosophers, literary writers, and novelists have been captivated by the phenomenon of the inner voice. According to Hikins (1989), in our everyday language, we use many phrases that relate to the inner voice including: "I'll have to think about it," "so I stopped and said to myself," "a penny for your thoughts," and "listen to

your conscience.” The inner voice is powerful and highly personal, with each individual’s private thoughts being unique. The nature and content of the inner speech significantly and inevitably affects an individual’s emotions, behaviors, and moods. When our self-talk is “pessimistic, negative and irrational, we tend to feel sad, anxious or depressed. On the other hand, when we talk to ourselves in optimistic, hopeful, and positive ways we tend to feel happy, positive, and hopeful” (Payne & Manning, 1998, p. 199). Through self-reflection, “we possess the power of choice and the ability to identify, challenge, and change this counterproductive thinking” (p.199). An alteration in the inner voice can empower an individual to transform the self in times of change, partake in positive self-leadership, and persevere in a desired direction.

It is the competent self that has the ability to look beyond obstacles and see possibilities (Denmark, 1993). According to Saral (1983), the “external structures that we perceive, cognize, and communicate to others are mere reflections or manifestations of our inner structures” (p. 55). To bring about changes in the external structures, one needs to facilitate an ongoing process of intrapersonal communication. As an individual begins to acknowledge and communicate with different aspects of their self, “the external structure begins to dissolve and reform into different patterns of relationship reflecting the existing status of [their] internal structures” (p. 55). This calls attention to the paramount need and intrinsic value behind ongoing intrapersonal communication.

The Influential Role of a Self-communication System on Self-perceptions

Ever since I was a little girl I can remember talking to myself. Through the innocence of childhood, I engaged in rich conversations with myself regarding friends, family members, and every day events. As I grew older, I learned to silence personal conversations with myself to those around me. As childhood innocence faded, I began to see the world through the eyes of a maturing adult, and the nature of my self-talk changed. Little did I understand how self-talk developed and the extent of its influence on how I perceived my world. I was unaware of its overpowering nature in being able to encourage and motivate me to accomplish my goals or limit me through debilitating thoughts and resulting behaviors. While my inner voice was gentle and self-nurturing at times, it was demanding and self-demeaning at others. Through increased self-awareness and reflection on the patterns of my self-talk, I slowly came to believe that I was personally responsible for the way that I had created my world and, as a result, became determined to recreate it more positively. My lived experience, as both a student and a teacher, has revealed the fruitful results of a healthy inner voice and intrapersonal awareness to me and the detrimental effects of negative internal conversations.

Transforming the Self Through an Inward Journey into the Nature of Internal Dialogue

Current literature pertaining to the concept of inner voice does not address the importance of monitoring and transforming the self and how the relationship with the self is affected by the inner voice. It does not focus upon how the inner voice is an instrumental guiding force in self-awareness as a prerequisite to self-transformation and, in turn, self-leadership. This form of leadership starts from within and is influenced by the inner voice that can be perceived as an inner anchor or inner guide. This relates to what Ambrose (1995) states: that “to transform our organizations, our communities, or our lives, we must first transform ourselves. Leadership development, then, becomes a process of self-reflection aimed at personal growth: a journey inward” (p. 25).

Invitational education emphasizes the importance of drawing attention to the voices of children and their teachers in the classroom, how they speak to themselves, and how their self-talk influences the other through the decisions and actions that they take. Deeper insights into the inner workings of the classroom can be gained by advancing our understanding of children’s and teachers’ experiences regarding their inner voice and subsequent interactions in the classroom.

The purpose behind this paper is not merely to analyze or interpret but rather to fill a void in the literature, extend invitational thinking, and understand the influential role of the inner voice. It raises the question: To

what extent does self-talk play a role in influencing, shaping, and interpreting the experiences of teachers and students in schools? An articulate, provocative, and informed response to this question involves an in-depth discussion of teacher self-talk, teacher influence on student self-talk, and student self-talk. This paper provides a portal to improve our understanding of the importance behind teachers and children transforming their internal dialogue by listening to their inner voices, becoming healthy-minded individuals, inviting positive self-talk, and moving beyond challenges.

Who Am I? The Impact Of Messages Received From Significant Others On Self-Concept

*Re-examine all that you have been told...
dismiss that which insults your soul.*

Walt Whitman

Invitational theory is grounded in self-concept theory. Self-concept is defined as a “complex, dynamic, and organized system of learned beliefs that an individual holds to be true about his or her personal existence” (Purkey, 2000, p. 14). Proponents of invitational education believe that “respect for individual uniqueness is essential for positive self-concept development, academic achievement, and ultimately, success in life” (Reed as cited in Novak, 1992, p. 48). This self is highly abstract and multifaceted. A person knows his or her self through internal dialogue which is influenced by the “experiences woven in everyday life, concealed in everyday occurrences [and] hidden in deep communications of unspoken feelings” (Purkey, 2000, p. 48). Messages given to a child can be filtered through

invitational propositions that “proclaim that the child is able, valuable, and responsible or unable, worthless, and irresponsible” (p. 54). The role of the teacher is of particular significance in this enculturation process, since the child progressively internalizes these messages. The self is a core dimension of human experience and plays an instrumental role in an individual’s internal dialogue and personal self-awareness. It can never be understood in its entirety because it is culturally bound and primarily implicit (Purkey, 2000).

Invitational education, as a theory of practice, attempts to “provide an integrative framework for constructing environments and cultures that extend and evaluate intentional messages that affirm the uniqueness, possibilities, and dignity of all involved in the educative process” (Novak, 1992; Stanley as cited in Novak, 1992, p. 3). It provides a “positive lens from which to view student potential, skills and abilities” (Reed as cited in Novak, 1992, p. 69). According to “invitational education,” schools should be “the most inviting places in town” (Purkey & Novak, 1996, p.3). Due to constant interaction between children and the educational system, schools, next to the home, “probably exert the single greatest influence on how students see themselves and their abilities” (p. 27).

Personal experiences shape self-perceptions

There is no greater penance than patience, No greater happiness than contentment, No greater evil than greed, No greater virtue than mercy,

And no more potent weapon than forgiveness.

Sri Guru Amar Das Ji

The early years of a child’s life are critical in forming his or her self-concept. A child’s self-concept is shaped by the nature of the invitations that are received through interactions with significant others. Self-evaluations stem rather directly from the evaluations made of the child by others. These evaluations are more than words and are “embedded in body language, looks, touch, tone of voice, and other nonverbal messages” (Purkey, 2000, p. 45). “Asking a student to describe what significant others say about him or her reveals much about what students say to themselves” (p. 26). In the give and take of countless interactions, “children tend to believe what the world believes about them” (p. 45). These beliefs coupled with the treatment by significant others influence how students define themselves. In turn, self-definitions influence internal dialogue and ultimately academic success or failure (Purkey, 2000). Our self-perceptions vary from situation to situation and from one phase of our lives to another. Thus, the self-concept evolves through constant self-evaluation in different situations and is influenced by various experiences and events including performance in school and treatment by teachers and peers. Teachers, as significant others in their students’ lives, have the potential to open new worlds for their students and can either inhibit or enable them to grow as students and people.

By listening to their inner voices, individuals can steer themselves through

challenges and transform their lives, or cave in to self-debilitating thoughts and not persevere through hardships (Purkey, 2000). In order to see the complexities of the inner voice and how it influences the self-concept of a child, a myriad of theories pertaining to the inner voice and the self must be examined. The current knowledge regarding human development is interdisciplinary. Numerous perspectives put forth in the literature focus on the different domains of human development and how the self is influenced. Among the many researchers who have focused on the development of the self, three distinct researchers have explicitly put forth theories that stress the importance that influence plays in this development. Cooley's (1902) looking glass theory, Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory, and Bandura's social learning theory (1977) allow us to understand how we define the self in relation to others and how we draw meaning from our world. An individual's sense of self, feelings, and behaviors are strongly influenced by his or her internal dialogue (Butler, 1992). Thus, changes in this dialogue would result in changes in overt behaviors. Various cognitive behavioral models including rational-emotive therapy (Ellis, 1976), cognitive therapy (Beck, 1976), and cognitive behavior modification (Meichenbaum, 1977) have consistently documented the importance of the influential link between a person's thoughts and inner speech, what they feel, and how they behave.

What Are The Whispers Saying To The Self?

We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts.

With our thoughts we make the world.

Buddha

As social beings, we develop a diverse array of assumptions and beliefs about ourselves and others and, in turn, use them as a frame of reference for understanding the world. Our psychological reality consists of a reciprocal relationship between our experiences, beliefs, and internal dialogue. Self-talk, also referred to as internal dialogue, inner conversations, inner voices, and the whispering self, enables students, teachers, and others to organize their interpretations of the world and "speak to themselves about who they are and how they fit in their world" (Purkey, 2000, p. 1). The language they use to articulate their thoughts impacts their internal dialogue, shapes their perceptual world, and influences their behavior.

Self-talk, a unique and ongoing personal voice, constitutes a substantial part of an individual's thought process and, as a constant companion, influences behaviors and allows him or her to draw meaning from the world. A self-communication system enables individuals to reflect upon the experiences and events that they encounter every day. Intrapersonal communication is "all of the physiological and psychological processing of messages that happens within individuals at conscious and non-conscious levels as they attempt to understand themselves and their environment" (Roberts, Edwards, & Barker, 1987, p. 2). This process is best understood when it is related

to interpersonal communication. Barker and Wiseman (1966) believe that “intrapersonal communication is the foundation upon which interpersonal communication is based, but intrapersonal communication may also occur independently” (p. 173). Research on the concept of intrapersonal communication comes not only from the field of communication but crosses into other disciplines including business, education, and sociology. In these disciplines, it is understood that our inner voice shapes our world (Fodor, Bever, & Garrett, 1974; Manz, 1983; Manz & Neck, 1999; Roberts et al., 1987). Since our inner voice shapes our thoughts and feelings, it plays a major role in self-regulation, problem solving, and planning (Payne & Manning, 1998). Many of the inner voice’s major activities involve the process of internal problem solving, resolution of internal conflict, planning for the future, emotional catharsis, evaluations of ourselves and others, and the relationships between ourselves and others. Intrapersonal communication involves only the self, and it must be clearly understood by the self because it constitutes the basis for all other communication. (Pearson & Nelson, 1985, p. 12)

Transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000) puts forth the idea that an individual can become aware of holding a limiting or distorted view. If the individual critically examines this view, opens up to alternatives, and consequently changes perception, a transformation in some part of how they make meaning out of the world takes place. According to Mezirow (1997), “transformative learning develops

autonomous thinking” (p. 5). It takes place when the process of questioning and discussing previously uncritically assimilated assumptions, beliefs, values, and perspectives leads “us to open up our frame of reference, discard a habit of mind, see alternatives, and thereby act differently in the world” (Mezirow and Associates, 2000, as cited in Cranton & King, 2003, p. 32). Schools must intentionally invite students and teachers to engage in positive internal conversations. By transforming inner speech, these individuals can alter their outer behavior and promote healthy school environments in which these transformative invitations are extended to all those involved in the educational sphere.

Teacher Self-reflections on Internal Dialogue

You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe deserve your love and affection.

Buddha

Classrooms today are “characterized by student diversity in all its facets – racial, gender, and socio-economic as well as by wide differences in ability, educational readiness, motivation and age” (Brookfield, 2002, p. 31). To address such diversity, teachers must engage in a practice where they are conscious of their values, beliefs, and assumptions, because inevitably, they influence their teaching practice. The craft of teaching involves teachers understanding themselves, others, and the norms of the educative system, community, and society in which they live (Cranton & King, 2003).

Through the lens of transformative learning theory, knowledge about teaching can be regarded as being primarily communicative in nature (Cranton & Carusetta, 2002). This knowledge is “acquired and revised through discourse, interpretation, and reflection on experience” (p. 167). At the heart of transformative learning, this knowledge is about teachers questioning and reflecting upon what they do and why they believe it is important. By critically examining their teaching practices, teachers may transform how they derive meaning from the world, acquire alternative ways of understanding what they do, and consequently alter their teaching practice.

Self-reflection and self-discovery are ongoing and necessary processes. They enable teachers to acquire the tools to develop, articulate, and then defend their teaching philosophy, practices, and beliefs. Invitational theory accentuates the significance of continual connection of ideas and beliefs to practice, encourages ongoing dialogue concerning the complexities and effectiveness behind teaching from an inviting stance, and highlights the transformative possibilities of invitational thinking. Through enhanced self-awareness, educators open the possibilities of allowing their personal experiences to become the vehicle for understanding their students. Transformation in thinking can manifest when teachers are faced with new teaching contexts and forced to partake in critical reflection on their philosophy and practice of teaching. Such reflection has the potential to “lead to revised assumptions, beliefs, and perspectives” (p. 167). Although being a teacher can be intrinsically rewarding when

seeing children grasp complicated concepts, strengthen their skills, and extend newly learned knowledge into their daily lives, it can also be an extremely demanding, challenging, and sometimes stressful profession. Teachers can choose how they speak to themselves and can frequently regulate the level of stress in their lives by choosing inviting language that counteracts stress (Payne & Manning, 1998). For example, “I can handle this,” “it does not matter if I make a mistake,” “this is a learning experience.”

It is crucial for teachers to value themselves in the educative process and not perceive themselves as working in a structured organization where they are just functionaries. The process by which a teacher perceives prominence in classrooms and becomes a beneficial presence in the lives of students rests on two vital factors: “(a) the whispering self of the teacher and (b) what the teacher does” (Purkey, 2000, p. 56). Ideally, the task of teachers is to “purposefully monitor negative self-talk, formulate productive internal dialogue, and then practice it until it becomes an automatic part of consciousness” (p. 56). By achieving mastery over their self-talk, which leads to mastery of consciousness itself, a teacher becomes a beneficial presence in the lives of students. To ameliorate the learning environments in today’s schools, what teachers say to themselves about their situations and purposes must be refined. Their internal dialogue can hinder both their personal and professional development and colour their daily experiences with a negative paintbrush. Burns (1980), Butler (1992), Helmstetter (1991), and

Meichenbaum (1977) put forth the idea that the language utilized in private speech inhibits, initiates, and reinforces behaviour. According to these cognitive semanticists, behaviour is self-regulated through self-talk.

How people feel about themselves rests upon how their minds filter and interpret everyday experiences (Csikszentmihaly, 1990). Teachers' inner conversations relate to both their professional and personal lives. Their internal dialogue influences their happiness in the classroom and in life (Purkey, 2000). Only when "teachers possess an inner voice that speaks positively and realistically about themselves and their abilities can they hope to give full attention to the needs of students" (p. 58). Beliefs and thoughts possessed by teachers influence and shape the decisions they make as educators. These "beliefs create a total school climate and when shared, shape school culture" (p. 78). Curtis and Altmann (1977) argue that a relationship exists between what teachers say to themselves about themselves and what they say to themselves about students. Teachers who think good thoughts about themselves tend to evaluate their students more positively. The "reverse is true of teachers who rate themselves low on self-concept" (Purkey, 2000, p. 58). According to Secretan (2001), "it is not what we say that makes a difference and changes the world, or even how we say it, but why we say it and who we are while we are saying it" (p. 19).

The Process of Perspective Transformation

*Declare the truth of your own beauty
to yourself and be free from the*

*dungeons both of pleasures and
pains that you have made for
yourself*

Puran Singh

One may not be fully ready to explore the full range of emotions that may be unearthed as a result of delving into a reflective process. There are internal barriers which one has to confront and overcome in order to enable transformative learning to transpire. When taking steps towards perspective transformation, the need for change and empowerment must be recognized. At the same time, one must be ready for the change. The provision of support from one's environment can facilitate this process. When feeling the frustrations of one's limiting patterns and the empowering effects that evolve from an awareness of new possibilities, the reflective process is made more effective. To understand ourselves, we must ground ourselves in our own rich histories of teaching and learning. According to Fenwick and Parsons (1998), "autobiographical reflection is a powerful learning process" (p. 3). Critical reflection entails understanding one's own patterns of behaviour and thinking in one's own history. Through such analysis, we can discern "how our present envelops our past, and shapes future choices" (p. 3).

Reflecting on daily teaching experiences, whether individually or with colleagues, provides teachers with an avenue to improve their teaching. To start the reflective process, they are encouraged not to leap into an interpretive mode. A teacher must attempt to understand why an event happened the way it did and "search the

context within which the event occurred for explanations” (Hole & McEntee, 1999, p. 35). However, to become a reflective practitioner, a teacher must go beyond just the simple answer to why an event happened. Deeper meanings of the episodes must be unearthed (Hole & McEntee, 1999). As discussed by Hole and McEntee, it is helpful for teachers to hold their practice to the light of new understandings that may emerge during the cultivation of deep reflection and consider the implications for their practice. Reflection on experience can be perceived as a springboard for action and in turn transformation (Dyke, 2006). Reflection can be enhanced through open engagement with different worldviews, perceptions, and interpretations of experiences by others. Self-reflection, discussed by Boud (1993, as cited in Dyke, 2006), emphasizes the value of learning from the experiences of others and sharing one’s own experiences. By doing so, individuals expose their ideas to the critical gaze of others, prevent possessing a closed, localized view, and allow themselves to be placed in positions where their own assumptions are challenged. He argues that individuals need to be challenged so that they do not fool themselves with personally distorted assumptions or fail to consider new information which may reside outside their current realm of experience.

Within the context of teaching lies “a paradox between adapting to and becoming a conforming member of society and becoming an individual in that society” (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004, p. 21). As opposed to looking for standardized principles of effective practice, it is

important for educators to “examine how they as social human beings and individuals can develop their own way in the world of teaching” (p. 21). As a part of developing authenticity, teachers must differentiate their “own thoughts and values from those of the community within which they work” (p. 7). This process entails teachers being aware of their thoughts and genuinely being able to express themselves within the social context of their work. In essence, authenticity entails teachers knowing who they are and what they believe, bringing themselves into their classrooms, developing their personal teaching styles, and thereby communicating and relating to their students in a genuine way (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004). Critical reflection allows for open questioning and consideration of how teachers think about themselves and their teaching. The context within which they work, including the norms and expectations in the school and those in the broader community, “influences their perceptions of themselves, their students, and their relationships with students” (p. 17). A teacher who has a good understanding of herself or himself, both personally and professionally, “is more likely to articulate values, demonstrate congruence between values and actions, and be genuine and open” (p. 19).

In order to be a leader of others in life, one must be a leader of himself or herself first (Manz, 1983). Thus, teachers must learn how to be leaders of themselves in order to be able to effectively lead the students in their classrooms. Self-leadership is a process of self-influence that begins by listening to one’s inner voice. The connection between inner voice and the true essence of teacher

self-leadership allows teachers to move through change and beyond obstacles placed before them. According to Payne and Manning (1998), new ways for teachers to think about their inner speech have the potential “to impact either positively or negatively their feelings, self-esteem, health, and behavior” (p. 195). Leadership is not solely an outward process. Rather, it is an inward process that is influenced by past events that have played a major role in shaping one’s life (Manz, 1983). All teachers talk to themselves, and their inner voices are capable of influencing and determining the direction and the quality of their daily personal and professional lives. In teacher education, research indicates that: the use of self-talk with in-service and pre-service teachers has merit, especially when teachers are stressed, when circumstances lead to a disruption of previously acquired skills, when they are first learning to teach, or when they are attempting a new skill (Gallimore et al., 1986, as cited in Payne & Manning, 1998, p.197).

Transforming Negative Teacher Self-Talk Through Changing Beliefs

Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.

Rumi

There are a number of powerful, irrational, and illogical beliefs that prohibit many people from leading an unperturbed life (Ellis & Harper, 1975). These beliefs result in maladaptive, unhealthy, and nonfacilitative self-talk. By changing

irrational beliefs into rational ones, teachers positively affect and transform the nature of their self-talk (Payne & Manning, 1998). Rational, healthy self-talk promotes rational, healthy teacher behaviour. Thus, it is beneficial for teachers to place themselves in positions whereby they recognize unhealthy internal conversations and, in turn, substitute healthy ways to guide themselves while functioning in educational settings and in their personal lives.

Steps For Improving Teacher Self-Talk

Payne and Manning (1998) put forth five steps for improving teacher self-talk:

1. Change irrational beliefs to rational ones. When beliefs are changed to rational, healthy ones, self-talk is affected positively and changes. Rational self-talk promotes productive teacher behavior and may reduce teacher stress.
2. Record and examine the self-talk that takes place both out aloud and silently within the mind. Awareness is the first step for breaking out of an unhelpful self-talk cycle.
3. Become aware of cues that may signal unhelpful self-talk including feeling anxious or depressed, sudden shifts in emotions, and avoidance thoughts or behaviours. Physical symptoms may include uneasy stomach, sweaty palms and tension headaches. External events often instigate unhelpful self-talk. When its presence is noticed, interrupt the self-critical onslaught with the firm statement - “STOP! It is not helpful to talk to myself this way. Would I talk to a good friend this way” By realizing that critical

self-talk is not helpful, an individual can begin to disengage from it with the realization that it is no longer acceptable.

4. Identify and change negative self-talk statements to more positive, self-supportive, and constructive ones. For example, as opposed to saying, "Oh no, what will the parents think when their children go home and tell them about my mistake?" say, "Even teachers are entitled to human error. I can make mistakes and still be a good teacher." While the negative self-talk originates from the erroneous belief that mistakes are not acceptable, the more constructive self-statement arises from the rational belief that although it is marvelous to do something without error, some mistakes are unfortunate. If they are made, it is not the end of the world.
5. Encourage small improvements and be careful not to impose the 'Be Perfect' voice as improvements to self-talk are being tried. The goal is to reduce unhelpful self-talk and increase helpful self-talk. It takes considerable time, practice, and determination to change self-talk.

In discussing these five steps, Payne and Manning (1998) found it important to specify a set of self-questions that may be asked by teachers as identified by Maultsby (1975): (a) Is my self-talk helping me to solve problems? (b) Is my self-talk based on objective reality? (c) Is my self-talk optimistic? (d) Is my self-talk being a good friend to me? (e) Is my self-talk helping me to reach my short- and long-term goals, personally and professionally? Interventions

in teacher self-talk have been shown to be beneficial in reducing self-reported anxiety about teaching (Payne & Manning, 1990), improving lesson planning and teaching performance (Neely, 1986), and reducing stress in teaching (Forman, 1982).

So How Do Teachers Influence Student Self-Talk And Self-Perceptions In Classrooms?

I've come to a frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It's my personal approach that creates the climate. It's my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or dehumanized.

Hiam Ginott (1972)

Many factors affect teacher-student experiences in a classroom on a day-to-day and moment-by-moment basis. Students spend a sizeable portion of their lives in school, and their teachers determine the nature of its impact (Combs, 1982). Teachers who consciously are aware of teacher-student relationships are more likely to foster the growth of their students, care for them, and engage in dialogue with them (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004). This dialogue is critical to the learning process, and teachers define its nature. Teachers possess

immense influential power over their students' self-concepts, self-talk, level of success within the classroom, and attitudes toward school. Thus, they are encouraged to extend efforts to understand the perspectives of their students and keep their emotional well-being, diverse needs, and academic abilities in mind when interacting with them. Their perceptions influence the world of students, "who tend to see themselves as the teacher sees them" (Purkey, 2000, p. 57).

The essence of effective teaching must intertwine a personal dimension and focus upon the fostering and strengthening of "inviting" relationships in the classroom. Research identifies good teachers as "task-oriented, organized, structured and in control" (Payne & Manning, 1998, p. 195). However, attention must be awarded to the social and psychological factors related to teaching and learning. Teachers are prime agents in setting the emotional climate in the classroom. Through a heightened sense of emotional well-being, they place themselves in a better position to be able to create optimal learning environments in which students feel physically and psychologically safe (Maslow, 1970). Teachers must understand how their own beliefs and feelings affect their work with their students (Aspy & Roebuck, 1982). They are encouraged to actively monitor and reflect on their attitudes, personal values, and experiences, since they shape their teaching practice and treatment of students. Teachers constantly establish distinct relationships with their students, communicate their inner thoughts in their overt behavior, reveal their beliefs in their actions, and summon students to respond accordingly. Thus, their

beliefs about students are the critical ingredients in student success or failure in school. By sending out powerful invitations to students to share in positive experiences in the classroom, a teacher encourages students to believe in the intrinsic value of learning and foster positive internal dialogue. Teachers can either help promote a child's self-esteem or hinder a child's growth by constantly sending the child disinviting messages. When teachers "think well of their students and their abilities, students are likely to respond in positive ways" (Purkey, 2000, p. 60). Conversely, when they tell themselves that their students cannot achieve, "then student performance is influenced negatively" (p. 59). The teacher's internal dialogue about students has the power to influence how students view themselves and how well they learn in school.

The writings of Vygotsky are important to consider when discussing how teachers influence student self-talk and their behaviors. Accentuating the regulatory effect of inner speech upon behavior, Vygotsky (1962) postulated the theory of verbal self-regulation. He considered thought as internal self-talk, and language the substance of thought which directs action. According to this developmental psychologist, when children engage in private speech, they utilize the same words that adults once used to regulate their behaviors for the purposes of self-regulation. In relation to the educational sphere, he described self-regulation as an "inner-speech" function students internalize from the language that teachers use to mediate student learning in the classroom. Thus, a

student's self-talk serves to direct and guide their progress through difficult and unfamiliar materials, as adults, including teachers, have previously guided them. Vygotsky proposed that instruction in and mastery of subject-matter knowledge are primary forces underlying cognitive growth and that high level cognitive processes emerge through teacher-student interactions.

Self-talk has been studied as a means of enhancing self-awareness, self-regulation, and problem-solving. Vygotsky (as cited in Depape, Hakim, Voelkar, Page & Jackson, 2006) maintained that "overt self-talk served an adaptive function in children by regulating their actions during difficult problem solving, and that it eventually became internalized as self-regulatory thoughts or covert private speech by the early school-age years" (p. 2). Research has found developmental differences in student self-talk when they are faced with problem-solving situations. In their research on private speech with preschool children, Duncan and Pratt (1997) found that the preschoolers were more likely to use private speech when a task was difficult or novel than when it was easy or familiar. Furthermore, Winsler, DeLeon, Wallace, Carlton, and Willson-Quayle (2003) found evidence for consistency in children's private speech across problem-solving tasks in their research with children aged three to five years. Their study revealed that older children used more partially internalized forms of private speech such as whispering or muttering to themselves. In tune with Vygotsky's theory, their findings suggested a connection between children's

internalization of speech and behavioral self-regulation.

It is a "teacher's professional responsibility to be inviting in a deliberate and consistent manner" and to engage in positive self-talk about students by viewing them as able, valuable, and responsible (Beardsley & Jacobs as cited in Novak, 1992, p. 26). By doing so, teachers intentionally invite positive and realistic self-talk in their students. Each instructional move has an effect on the development of the child's sense of self.

What Is The Nature Of The Internal Conversations That Students Have With Themselves?

The self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action.

John Dewey

The early years of a child's life are critical in forming his or her self-concept. This self is formed from the experiences interwoven in everyday life. The educational institution is an important agent in a child's development. The prevailing nature of messages they receive in school affects their perceptions about themselves and their internal dialogue, which in turn affects their attitudes toward school, the relationships they form in school, and their school achievements. Teachers play a significant role in the messages that are filtered to children and their formulation of productive internal conversations.

Many of the successes and failures encountered and experienced by students "throughout their educational careers are

closely connected with their inner voices” (Purkey, 2000, p. 10). Students who experience continued honest success in school over time are likely “to develop self-talk that encourages them to put forth the effort, energy, and resources to learn what is being presented in the classroom” (p. 75). On the other hand, students who “encounter consistent failure and disapproval will move from negative self-talk (‘I’m so stupid’) to learned helplessness” (p. 75). Learned helplessness is the giving-up reaction whereby the student tells himself or herself that there is nothing that he or she can do to change. This lapse into total apathy “is often mistaken by educators as lack of motivation” (p. 75). While the inner voice in healthy personalities speaks of success, fulfillment, and assurance, individuals with negative internal dialogue establish limits to their performances and possess an inner voice that “speaks of fear, anxiety, and defeat” (p. 8). These individuals “tell themselves that they cannot learn, succeed, or assert, even when such things are not objectively true” (p. 10).

According to Seligman (1991), individuals can choose the way they think. The language they use to speak to themselves impacts their choices - choice of feelings and choice of behaviors. While healthy and appropriate self-talk leads to more productive affective, cognitive and behavior responses, unhealthy and inappropriate self-talk leads to more maladaptive responses. Humans are susceptible to negative self-talk. Approximately 75% (Helmstetter, 1986) of everything we say to ourselves is counterproductive. The ability to speak to oneself about oneself in positive and

realistic ways is an important aspect of invitational education.

Teaching individuals to alter their thoughts and internal conversations in an effort to bring forth constructive and productive emotions and behaviours is supported through numerous studies (Manning, 1991). In the educational sphere, self-talk strategies have resulted in improvements in student performance in the areas of academic performance of behaviour-problem students (Lovitt & Curtis, 1968), mathematics (Leon & Pepe, 1983), reading comprehension (Elliott-Faust & Pressley, 1986), and creative writing (Trimbur, 1987). By monitoring counterproductive and negative self-talk in the classroom, teachers can create a climate of optimism and respect, encouraging the growth of productive self-talk and the perceptions of their abilities in a propitious light. It is vital that educators have “respect, trust, and confidence in their children before their children can develop self-respect, self-trust, and self-confidence” (Purkey, 2000, p. 49). By giving students permission to attend to their internal dialogues, teachers encourage students to modify their inner conversations. Through core reflection, profound and fundamental changes can be made by reaching into deep-rooted beliefs and underlying issues that lie behind certain choices of actions. Core reflection “aims at building on people’s strengths, and on the positive feelings often triggered when people feel in touch with positive meanings, and with their strengths” (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005, p. 64). By assisting students in delving deeper into the richness of their inner potential, teachers encourage their students to enter into an

adventure of learning about their “self” and transforming their inner voices.

Conclusions

Do not utter even a single harsh word; your True Lord abides in all. Do not break anyone’s heart; these are all priceless jewels. The minds of all are like precious jewels; to harm them is not good at all.

Bhagat Sheikh Fareed Ji

Together, teachers and students can create learning environments that intentionally summon productive internal dialogue. Only through a deeper understanding and awareness of the beliefs that students and teachers hold about themselves, can the transformation in internal dialogue be initiated. People’s beliefs, affective reactions, and assumptions play a prominent role in structuring realities. Reviewing teaching and learning practices through various lenses helps to surface the assumptions teachers hold about pedagogic methods alongside the assumptions educators make concerning the “conditions that best foster student learning” (Brookfield, 2002, p. 32). By cultivating deep reflections, teachers are able to get to the heart of their teaching practices, acquire new insights, and make necessary changes.

The art of teaching is “a deeply human, social activity” (Combs, 1982, p. 162). The interactions that take place within the educational ecosystem communicate messages of personal adequacy or inadequacy to teachers and children, having an impact on what they say to themselves

and how they perceive their abilities. Invitations are at the heart of invitational education and “are messages which communicate to people that they are valuable, able, responsible and worthy of respect” (Russell as cited in Novak, 1992, p. 160).

Through enhanced self-awareness and healthy inner conversations, an individual can be empowered to invite positive experiences into daily life and deal with stresses in productive ways. A major benefit of self-supportive self-talk is that “it allows us to develop a protective barrier or buffer against the unpleasant situations in which we may find ourselves” (Payne & Manning, 1998, p. 200). Environmental unpredictability, sudden changes in schedules and lesson plans, unforeseen problems, and individual stress characterize the teaching profession. Circumstances of “teacher accountability and close public scrutiny necessitate the teacher’s need for positive, self-supportive speech” (Payne & Manning, 1998, p. 200). By regularly monitoring their inner conversations, teachers can choose and regulate many of their emotional and resulting behavioral reactions.

Educators play an instrumental role in guiding children on their personal journey and empowering them with positive beliefs in themselves as learners. To keep themselves grounded, teachers must “never forget what it’s like to be a child” (Purkey, 1992). By assisting students in visualizing their roles as active, productive, and successful members of their community, teachers can foster positive internal dialogue

and a self-monitoring process of thoughts. By being inviting, both personally and professionally, invitational educators can engage in practices that encourage positive and realistic self-talk in their students. This is a form of teaching that “involves commitment to the notion of the ability, value, and self-directing powers of every student” (Purkey, 2000, p. 61).

When an individual shares their private speech, it allows an observer a window into the mind. There is no tool that can measure the extent to which self-talk shapes an individual’s life experiences and interpretations of them. However, the contributions teachers “make to the growth of students often do not show until long after students have left” them (Combs, 1982, p. 175). The effect of a teacher’s actions or words upon a student’s internal dialogue may never be known to the teacher or even the student. The messages may have a great impact upon the whispering self and slowly send the student either into a cycle of negative self-talk or towards a strong sense of self-confidence. Students must be encouraged to monitor their internal dialogue on a regular basis and ensure that they choose beneficial steps towards self-fulfillment.

According to Payne and Manning (1998): The daily running dialogue or commentary inside our heads has the potential to impact, either positively or negatively, our feelings, level of stress, self-esteem, health, behavior, and interpersonal relationships. If we become aware of what we are telling ourselves (‘What am I saying to scare myself? Panic myself? Worry myself?’) then

we have taken the first steps to assuring a positive, rather than a negative impact. Once we become cognizant of the fact that the unhelpful things we are saying to ourselves are hurting us, then we can make a conscious choice to talk to ourselves in more helpful ways. (p. 197)

The greatest challenge is to weaken the power of self-defeating inner conversations and to empower oneself with positive beliefs by monitoring and altering the conversations. The question put forth in this paper, to what extent does self-talk play a role in influencing, shaping, and interpreting the experiences of teachers and students in schools? does not have a definitive answer. Instead, it results in a tentative answer that leads to further questions including, “how can the positive self-talk cycle be instigated?” This process would entail all individuals to start altering their thought processes and sending positive messages to others both verbally and nonverbally. This leads one to start pondering the role of “significant others” in an individual’s life. How does one build resilience to the negative messages received from significant others and not allow them to interfere with one’s own thought processes? Can the effects of negative self-talk be reversed, minimized, or even eliminated at a later stage in one’s life? Much research has been conducted on teacher influence on student self-talk. Future research inquiries must delve into understanding student influence on teacher self-talk. By doing so, further insights would be gained into the inner working of today’s classrooms and the impact on teacher-student interactions.

Final Thoughts

*Reflecting upon myself, and
conquering my mind, I have seen
there is no other friend like You.*

Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji

We are a product of extensive qualities of experiences that frame our perceptual worlds and define how we view ourselves. Our beliefs, affective reactions, and assumptions play a prominent role in structuring our realities. Our lives are

knitted into the fabric that we refer to as “reality.” This fabric forms a veil over our ability to understand ourselves, and when slowly shattered, may reveal further layers of distorted perceptions concealed deep within the mind. The reflective process enables one to dismantle the veil and restructure the thought processes that guide one’s actions. The ramification of the transformative experience rests in the hands of the individual.

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